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# THE LAST REMNANT™




## EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

Massive hands-on guide inside...

## INTERVIEW

## HIROSHI TAKAI

*The Last Remnant director talks tactics, tradition & technology*




# Welcome

It can sometimes be difficult for a developer to diversify from the genre it specialises in. Square Enix is undoubtedly the master of the Japanese role-playing game (or JRPG for short) and has released a number of classic titles which have appealed to a great many gamers in its country of origin. Yet, outside its most popular series – the Final Fantasy titles – the genre isn't nearly as popular in The West. With the Western videogame market on the rise, Square Enix needed to broaden its range a little – and it has done so effectively with The Last Remnant. It's a game which stirs in ingredients from traditional JRPGs but infuses those elements with a sprinkling of Western-friendly mechanics – a very different type of turn-based battle system that plays out almost like a strategy game, and characters, weapons and a general aesthetic which are more cosmopolitan than you might ordinarily expect. It has had a tremendous localisation, with cutscenes that are fully lip-synced with the Western dialogue, and a script that avoids the stilted, earnest feel of many more po-faced role-playing games.

In short, it deserves to be the breakthrough European hit the company is hoping it will be. We spent several hours playtesting the early part of the game, and were impressed by what we saw. Read our impressions over the next few pages and find out why you should be getting excited about one of the biggest RPGs of this year.

Enjoy the issue,

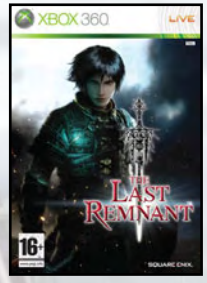
**Chris Schilling**

*"The Last Remnant boasts characters, weapons and a general aesthetic which are more cosmopolitan than you might ordinarily expect"*



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!

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**Publisher:** Square Enix
**Developer:** Square Enix
**Heritage:** Final Fantasy Dragon Quest Kingdom Hearts
**Link:** www.lastremnant-game.com
**ETA:** 20th Nov

PREVIEW

# The Last Remnant

## Exclusive hands-on with Square Enix's latest epic

The Last Remnant is a hugely significant title for Square Enix in that it represents this proud Japanese company's clearest statement of intent yet to attract a western audience. It might still have a turn-based battle system, and weave its story around a young man with a hitherto-untapped power, but in so many other respects this is a clear tilt at the western market. The Square-published Infinite Undiscovery took baby steps towards establishing the publisher in Europe and the US, but Last Remnant is a much more confident and purposeful stride forward into relatively uncharted territory for one of Japan's biggest videogame companies. But can the actual game live up to such lofty expectations?

From our time spent with the game we'd have to say yes – The Last Remnant manages the tricky balancing act of appealing to both a western and Japanese audience, without ever seeming like a compromise. It could potentially have been a game with an identity crisis, but it mixes familiar elements of old JRPGs with more western-centric design decisions that will undoubtedly please those who've thus far resisted the charms of this particular genre.

The action starts when a young man named Rush Sykes (whose moniker just about epitomises the culture-clash here) runs into

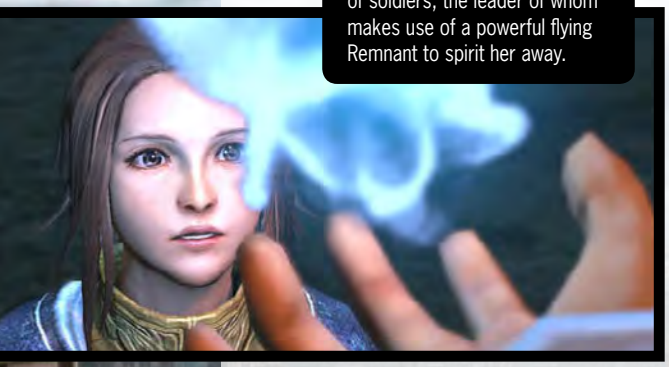



Athlum is the first town area you'll come across, and is the place where you'll meet the Four Generals – proud warriors who represent the Athlumian army.

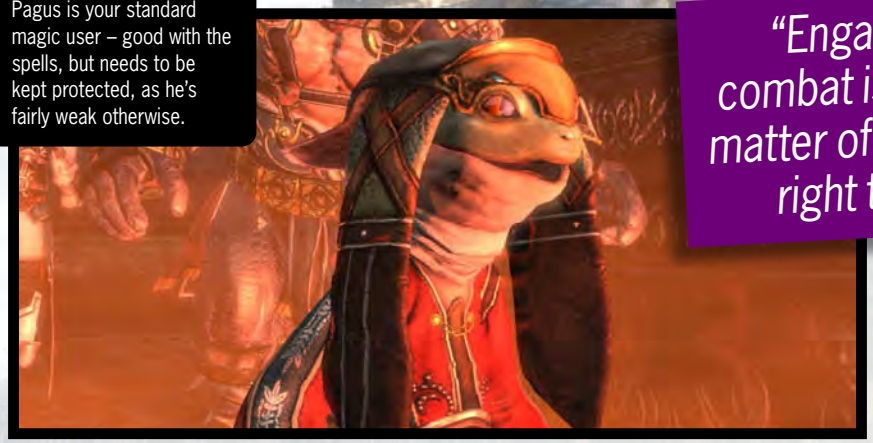



As you move around townships your cursor will shift around to highlight items and people of interest – most offer simple background but some can provide side-missions.

*"The Last Remnant will appeal to both a Western and a Japanese audience"*



Rush's sister Irina is kidnapped as the game begins by a group of soldiers, the leader of whom makes use of a powerful flying Remnant to spirit her away.



Pagus is your standard magic user – good with the spells, but needs to be kept protected, as he's fairly weak otherwise.

"Engaging in combat is a simple matter of pulling the right trigger"

## > The Last Remnant continued

trouble while looking for his missing sister. Stumbling upon a huge battle between two large armies, you're immediately thrust into an opening skirmish which doubles as an introduction to the game's combat mechanics. Instead of controlling single units, you'll fight using unions – groups of two or more combatants who will all act according to your commands. While this opening battle is pretty simple – your enemies are finished off with a blast from a gigantic weapon which is one of the mystical remnants of the title – things get quite a lot more complex. Are you sitting comfortably? Then let's begin.

### THE ENEMY WITHIN

Battles begin when you encounter an enemy while exploring – rather than random encounters you'll be able to see your foes in the field, and can avoid them if you're not in the mood for a scrap. Engaging in combat is a simple matter of pulling the right trigger when you're within range, whereupon a circle appears, with any creatures inside brought in to fight – allowing you to tackle multiple enemies at once, for higher risk but greater reward. Getting hold of enemies isn't quite as simple as this sounds – icons above their heads let you know whether they're likely to approach or flee when they spot you, and should you bump into a monster before you've had chance to squeeze that trigger then they will start with the upper-hand in battle. Get there first and you've got a much better chance of settling things quickly and efficiently. Once you've entered the battle screen, there's quite a lot of information to process, though it's all drip-fed through the first couple of dungeons so things never get overwhelming. You'll see your own unions lining up against the enemy's – usually each major character will get one union each, with one or more member to fight alongside the chief protagonists. So for example in an early trek to a place called Robelia Ruins, we were joined by Pagus, a member of an amphibious race




Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!




Icons above enemies' heads in the field let you know whether they're likely to attack, remain docile or flee in your presence.




# Command and conquer

Let battle commence...




First Strike | Mastering the arts | Locked and loaded

## First Strike

It's important to make sure you start battles on the front foot – catching an enemy unawares or simply ensuring you draw them in before they bump into you is important for team morale. Should you stumble into a creature in the field, the legend Enemy Advantage will be displayed, your union's morale will drop significantly and they will get a free attack.




On the opportunities where you get a special action command during battle, a perfectly-timed button press can often lead to further chances to enhance your union's attacks.

## > The Last Remnant continued

named qsiti, who gave us the power to use mystic arts – or magic, if you're a little more traditionalist - in combat. Rather than just simple 'attack' or 'defend' commands, the orders you can give a union are a little more specific – 'attack with combat arts!' uses up more action points (AP) than its more straightforward equivalent, while you can also ask unions to reserve their strength to a certain degree by asking them to 'keep your HP up' which will usually involve one troop in that particular union attacking while the other uses a health potion.

### TRADE UNION

These commands change regularly throughout the battle sequences, however, depending upon the current situation – should an allied union be struggling, you'll be able to dash to their aid with a command of 'save them, no matter what' – risking one union to rescue



Emma Honeywell may not have the most threatening name, but she's a battle-hardened soldier with a stern manner.

*"It's important to make sure you start battles on the front foot"*

**Roll over screen for annotations**

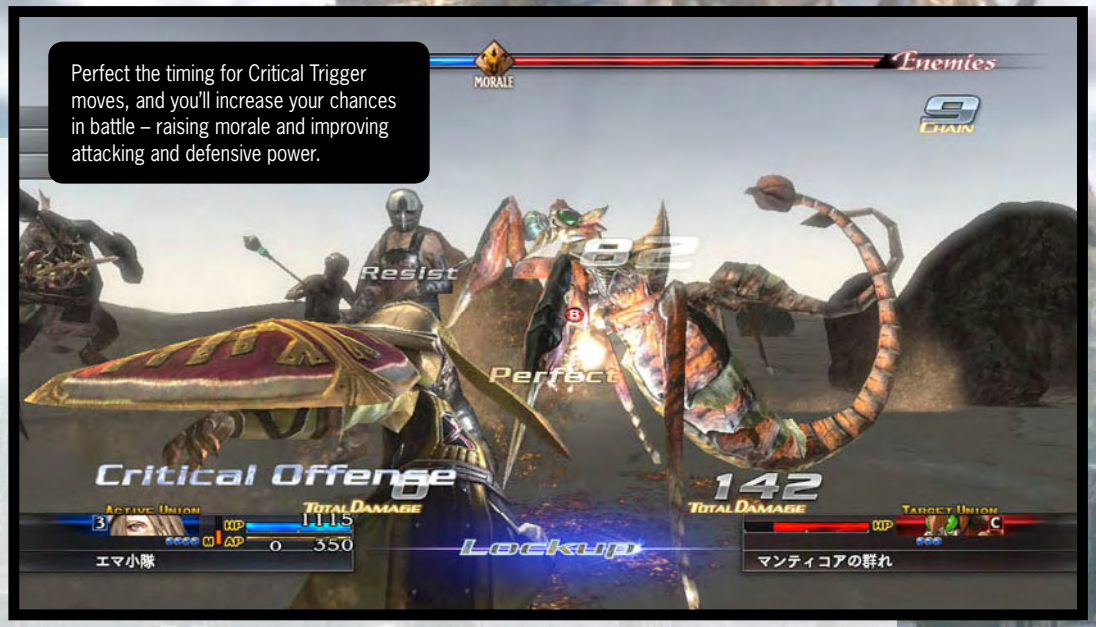


## > The Last Remnant continued

another. Orders are also affected by the morale bar, which ebbs and flows during the course of each skirmish according to which side is on top. The positioning and timing of your attacks is key, as you can flank enemies to deal more damage, or even get flanked yourself, or interrupt an enemy rushing towards your back line by leaving one of your unions in the way. Once you've engaged with an enemy union, you enter a state of Deadlock, which sees both unions battle it out until one is down – and once you've defeated all unions, the battle is won.

There's even more to it than that, with the likes of Guest Unions who you cannot assign battle commands to, and Botches – which occur when a union's leader falls and you won't be able to order them around until the end of the fight. It might sound a little bewildering, but it soon becomes second nature when you're playing and leads to some frenetic, chaotic battles, particularly when several unions are fighting it out. There are even timed commands that lend a bit more urgency to proceedings once you've issued your orders – simply pressing the right button at the right time can execute a Critical Trigger – for a more powerful attack or more effective defensive manoeuvre (often with the added sting of a counter). Should you find your team's morale high, you'll even get the opportunity to immediately repeat the process, when the legend 'teamwork' appears – allowing you to chain attacks for extra damage or additional points which affect the loot you're able to take home once you've finished.

> "Battles can be frenetic, particularly when several unions are fighting it out"

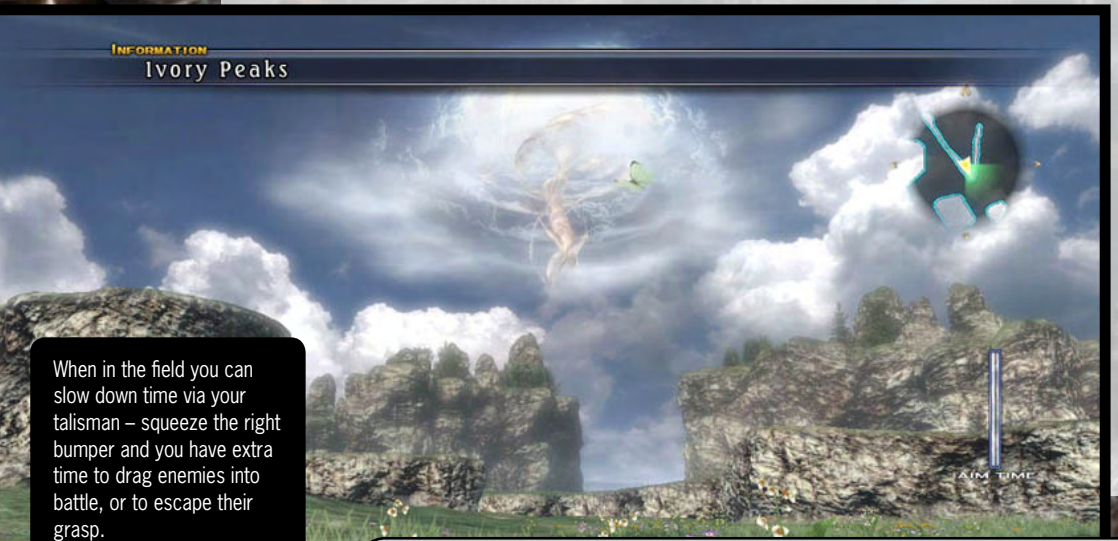



Perfect the timing for Critical Trigger moves, and you'll increase your chances in battle – raising morale and improving attacking and defensive power.

## QUICKFIRE QUIZ

### RETAIL THERAPY

Venture into the game's towns with your hard-earned spoils, and you'll notice that each one is split into a series of small areas, with the notable shops and other points of interest highlighted on the city map, allowing you to see at an instant where you need to be, rather than aimlessly wandering around, trying every door to see what you can find. It's an impressively streamlined system, that, coupled with some very short loading times, cuts down the busywork found in many other JRPGs. You'll find the usual item, weapon, armour and




When in the field you can slow down time via your talisman – squeeze the right bumper and you have extra time to drag enemies into battle, or to escape their grasp.

## > The Last Remnant continued




A nice touch sees your selected union clashing swords with enemies every now and again while they await your orders.



potion shops, and if the first town of Athlum is anything to go by, there will be plenty of pubs and guilds to visit – the former useful when requiring information about sidequests and the like, with the latter providing other missions to level up your characters or just to provide a break from the main story quests. Should you happen to be about to visit a particularly dangerous area, you can even spend money on hired muscle to help you through the more difficult encounters. Another neat touch is the ability to sell on the bodies of the monsters you slay for significant profit, or to split their corpses into their constituent parts, which are less valuable, but often used in items or armour.

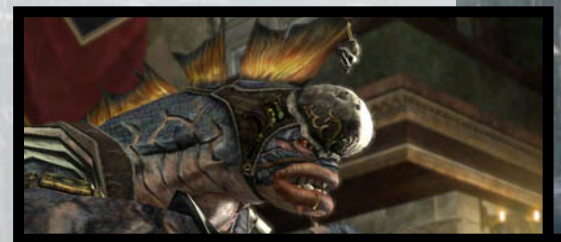
### SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

This being a Square Enix title, The Last Remnant's presentation is typically polished, with large and well-animated characters and detailed backdrops. The character and enemy designs are exceptional, while the voice acting is generally very impressive, and it's nice to see that lip-syncing matches the western dialogue. Meanwhile the music offers something a little less traditional than your standard RPG themes, with some pulsing rhythmic percussion and the occasional squealing electric guitar lick changing things up a little from the usual orchestral bombast. Indeed, The Last Remnant is all about taking things in a different direction – there's even a little blood spray when you connect with your attacks, which is unusual for a Square Enix game.




You'll get very little back for selling items you've purchased, but anything brought from battle tends to fetch a tidy price – particularly any captured monsters.

> *"The Last Remnant is all about taking things in a different direction"*



This fearsome fish-man is an ugly brute named Blocter, whose powerful axe blows can deal devastating damage to enemy unions.

Yet JRPG fans needn't worry, either – there are still enough spiky-haired heroes, gigantic fish-people, ridiculously large swords and charmingly innocent characters and story events to keep traditionalists hooked. For a game which risked appearing schizophrenic by the way it mixes elements of both eastern and western-centric role-playing games, it's remarkable that it retains its own definite identity - with a deep, tactical combat system welded to a thoroughly enjoyable bit of escapist hokum. In mixing those exciting battles with a compelling story, Last Remnant really does offer the best of both worlds. ●

THE LAST REMNANT

INTERVIEW

# Hiroshi Takai

## The Last Remnant director discusses tactics, tradition and technology

Hiroshi Takai has worked on the battle systems for several Square Enix games, making him the ideal candidate for director of a game whose combat is entirely unique to the RPG genre. We spoke to the man behind these inventive fight mechanics to find out exactly what makes the game tick.

**The Last Remnant has a really innovative battle system. How did the idea for it come about?**
When development of the previous game was completed, I started getting ideas together with a desire to create a new game where the player only needs to enter one command to get all the characters in action. This basic concept was somehow stored in my head from the beginning but, frankly, I have no idea how it got in there.

**Was the idea of a more tactical combat setup inspired or influenced by any other games?**
We held "brain storming" sessions on the basis of the aforementioned basic concept and began to cast them into shape such as the union formation and the moral gauge. As for what inspired us, I suppose that games we have been involved in before must have given an influence and so must various other games, films and animation works that we have personally experienced. However, any possible influences would have been only given

>

*"We attempted to shift our usual style of visual expressions towards something more realistic"*

Takai-san has been working on Square Enix titles for over fifteen years, with the Romancing SaGa series among his best-known work.




Early battles can be over in just a few turns, but larger boss creatures and more epic battles require constant readjustment of tactics.




It's best to try and keep all your unions alive to give you greater strength in numbers – even if one group is low on energy it can still turn the tide in battle.

## > Interview continued

on my sub-consciousness and I cannot single out exactly which ones have inspired me.

**The game seems to be geared more towards a western audience than previous Square Enix titles. Was it difficult to break with tradition and attempt something that was less obviously Japanese?**
I regarded it as a positive challenge to keep all JP, US and EU in mind regarding game appearances and the in-game universe. On the other hand, we had a really tough time localising the game and coordinating the development schedule in order to release this work simultaneously.

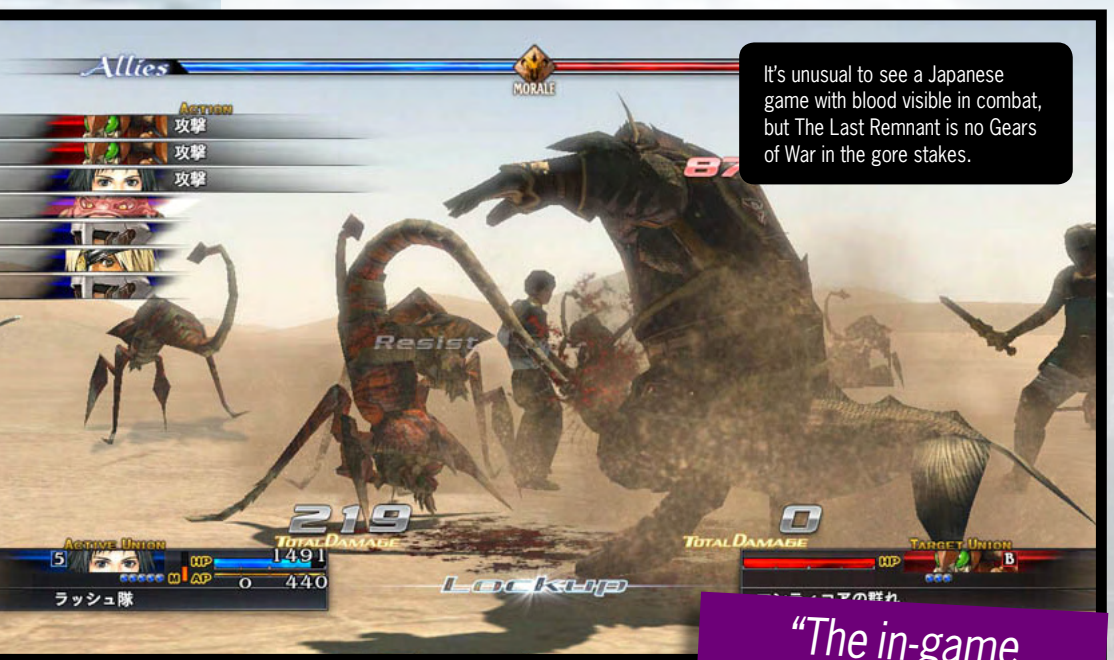
**Unusually for a Square Enix title, when you make contact with your weapon, you'll see a bit of blood. Is that down to the desire to appeal to a western audience who seem to accept more realistic violence? Will the Japanese game lose that blood effect?**
In this game, we made attempts to shift our usual style of visual expressions slightly towards something more realistic. Following these efforts, the characters and the background are depicted more realistically and we thought the game would look strange unless blood and bodily fluids are described as well, as they would naturally be visible when an attack is made. I could say that we took the policy of increasing the level of in-game realism in order to appeal to Western players and expressions of blood came with it consequently. Considering the Japanese sense, it would be less likely that home players find bloody scenes uplifting. However, we are prepared to express blood as necessary, particularly if lack of it would cause a feel of incongruity or negatively affect the consistency of the game concepts.

*"We took the policy to increase in-game realism – the blood came with it"*

**Are you concerned that this switch to a more western-friendly style of gameplay will alienate Japanese gamers or those fond of traditional JRPGs?**
Even if we produce a game with an intention of making it >




The longer a battle goes on, the greater your chances of being able to pull off more powerful, specialised attacks.




It's unusual to see a Japanese game with blood visible in combat, but The Last Remnant is no Gears of War in the gore stakes.



While The Last Remnant's characters have been designed to appeal to western audiences, there's still a very definite Japanese flavour to the game.

## > Interview continued

appealing to Western players, the "Japanese taste" would invariably be exuded out of it. As long as the game has this "taste" within it, I think it will always be found enjoyable by Japanese players as well.

**Is The Last Remnant intended as a one-off standalone title, or are you hoping it will be the start of a long-running franchise?**
Regarding the in-game universe, it has been made to have the potential of expanding itself as far as we want it to. Having said that, the possibility of making it into a series was not on my mind during the development stages and, even now, I have no immediate intension of moving on to make a sequel.

*"The in-game universe can expand itself as far as we want it to"*

**There's a lot going on in the battle scenes, with plenty of characters fighting on screen at once – do you think that this proves that Japanese developers are catching up with Western ones when it comes to making the most of the current-gen consoles?**
I feel as though I have finally began to see various issues as the first work has been completed. I am aware of aspects which would be improved if we were to produce a game now and have gained some confidence in taking on the current-gen and next-gen consoles in the future. With our next work or the one after, we may be capable of competing on even ground against games released by top developers in the West.

**The game's towns and other settlements are unusual in that they're split into bite-sized sections to minimise the time spent wandering around. Will the game feature some larger areas to potentially get lost in, or is the whole game more streamlined than other more epic role-playing games?**
Although the maps with no "symbol targets" have been streamlined, there are still some huge dungeons in the game.
As for the story, will we find out exactly how the Remnants arrived in the world, or is that to be kept as a mystery?
Please save it till you find out yourself by playing the game!

**Finally, which aspect of the game are you most proud of?**
It is the sensation the player can enjoy during a battle. I expect you will experience an adrenaline rush especially in a battle against a powerful boss enemy.

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